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With
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ב"ה

Parshas Vayigash

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The Leading Leaders

Okay, let's address the proverbial parshah "elephant in the room." Why exactly did Yosef not tell his father he was alive years before? He knew Yaakov was in immense pain. He knew his father was probably mourning him. Why not spare him that anguish?

Let's address another proverbial parshah "elephant in the room." How could the brothers have been so remarkably evil to attempt to murder their own brother? I don't care what Yosef did to them; who kills their own brother? These are the shevatim that we are to look up to? These are the embodiment of the Avos? These are the tribes that we admire? Brother murderers? There is obviously something we are missing. What?

Reb Shmshon Rafael Hirsch offers the following breath of clarity. The brothers knew full well that they were not a mere family of twelve. They knew they were not just some group that happens to be kind and caring, what we would call the "nice family on the block." The brothers were well aware that they were to become the eventual leaders of a nation that would carry the torch of morality for the rest of the world. They knew that they were to become the heads of a nation that would introduce the Godly concept of spirituality to mankind. They were well aware of the sacred mission they were embarking on.

Hence, when Yosef began demonstrating signs that he was leaning towards kingship, when he began claiming that he was to become king over the rest of them, when he began showing signs that he favored monarchism, the brothers viewed it as more than just an annoying little brother hoping to one day be a royal king. The brothers viewed Yosef's claims as a potential destroyer of the nation of spirituality they were tasked with cultivating. The brothers viewed monarchy in its ancient form as being diametrically opposed to the nation the brothers were hoping to start. Monarchism, which shuns spiritual greatness of the individual and cares only about the leadership of the king, is in direct contrast with Judaism, which is entirely about the spiritual potential of the individual.

The brothers knew that Judaism is unique in the sense that we are all part of a *mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh*, a holy and royal nation. We can all climb to be on the level of a prophet. Or a scholar. Or a sage. There is no one individual whom greatness is reserved for. The brothers felt that if that is what Yosef was promulgating, he is a threat to the future of the entire Jewish people. He is a threat to the spiritual growth of the future nation. If he wants monarchism, he has to go. True, it was painful for them. True, it was a heart-wrenching decision. But it was a decision out of true love and steadfast commitment to the mission they were on.

Yosef knew that if he sent word to Yaakov and the brothers that he was not only alive in Egypt, but was second in command to the mighty Pharaoh, he would only be reinforcing his brother's old claims. He knew that granted, he would relieve Yaakov of the pain he was feeling for losing a son, but it will only cause him to lose ten more. For if the brothers found out that Yosef was in fact a king in Egypt, their suspicions and fears would have only been validated. And off they would march to start the nation somewhere else.

The Individual

So, Yosef decided to wait. He decided to wait until the perfect time to show the brothers they were making a mistake. To show the brothers that true, the twelve of them are set to become the flag bearers of our nation, one that puts immense emphasis on the potential of the individual. Nevertheless, a king doesn't have to be contradictory to that. A leader, if acting correctly, can be a source of immense encouragement to the masses. He can breathe hope and life into the individual. He can serve as a role model for the common folk to reflect. True, a king can push down, but he can also rise up. A king done right can be the ultimate catalyst for the growth of the individual.

Some religions have a leader who takes all responsibilities and power. Some religions have leaders who take no responsibilities. Judaism has a unique blend. Yes, we have leaders and we have Rabbis. We have kings and we have prophets. But their mission is not to bear the spiritual burden of the community. Rather, their mission is to ensure that each and every member of our community is forever climbing that holy ladder towards greatness. Forever climbing that ladder towards spiritual heights. Forever climbing the ladder that the twelve holy brothers erected for us.

Pictures on the Wall

In the early years of the State of Israel, there was a Moshav that was half observant and half unobservant. When it came time to build a school it was decided that there were simply not enough kids for two separate schools. Being that each side had drastically different outlooks on what Jewish education should look like, there was a great debate as to who should have the leadership of the school. They came to a middle ground that one side would pick the principal and the other side would pick the teachers. The religious side was not sure which one to pick. Like most major questions of those days, they went to the undisputed sage of the land, the Chazon Ish. They asked him if it's better to have a religious principal with irreligious teachers or religious teachers and a non-religious principal. What he told them surprised them. He said, "Not only can the nonobservant have the principal, they can have the teachers as well. The only thing the kids need is for you to line the walls of the school from top to bottom with pictures of *Gedolim*, our nation's holiest sages. No space should be left empty. Merely looking at these great men, our leaders, should instill in them the awe and aura our great nation exudes."

Our leaders are our inspiration to become better. They allow us to see ourselves. They allow us to grow ourselves. They gently prod us to be the best version of us. We look up to them to remind ourselves that in Judaism the sky is the limit. Our job is to keep climbing that ladder.